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## Columns of Vengeance: Soldiers, Sioux, and the Punitive Expeditions, 1863-1864

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Although *Making Freedom* is primarily a study of the Underground Railroad in the East, chiefly southeastern Pennsylvania, it may represent in some measure the experience of midwestern states like Iowa as well. It deserves its place on the growing shelf of studies of the Underground Railroad.

*Columns of Vengeance: Soldiers, Sioux, and the Punitive Expeditions, 1863–1864*, by Paul N. Beck. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. xiv, 314 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 hardcover.

Reviewer J. T. Murphy is professor of history at Indiana University South Bend. He is the author of “‘To Sound My Trumpet’: Henry Hastings Sibley, Minnesota, and the Rise of a National Identity” in *The State We’re In: Reflections on Minnesota History* (2010).

On August 21, 1862, Alexander Ramsey, Minnesota’s governor, telegraphed the war office in Washington, D.C., with news that “Sioux Indians on our western border have risen, and are murdering men, women and children” (25). The resulting conflict was short-lived, but it left hundreds dead in the Minnesota River valley, including 38 Dakota men hanged for their participation, and the tone of Ramsey’s message presaged the retribution that followed. Over the next two years, the federal government, relying on troops raised in Minnesota, Iowa, and Nebraska, moved to punish any Dakota bent on continued resistance, and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton established the Department of the Northwest, commanded by Major General John Pope. After a lackluster showing at Second Bull Run and needing a successful offensive for redemption, Pope inflated the Indian danger and pushed his field commanders, Brigadier Generals Henry H. Sibley and Alfred Sully, for results. Unfortunately, native tribes between the Red and Yellowstone Rivers found themselves forced to fight—whether in self-defense or to avenge kinsmen—against men intent on battlefield glory and driven by their own quest for revenge.

Using government documents, established scholarship, and a wealth of letters and diaries, Paul N. Beck traces the punitive campaigns with scrupulous care and offers an evenhanded assessment of events and decisions. He begins by identifying the bands of Siouan people central to his narrative, explaining their history, and placing them within the context of the Civil War. After Fort Sumter, the transfer of army regulars southward emboldened many Indians on the northern plains. Traditionalists continued to resist assimilation, and the government’s failure to issue annuities, after a season of drought

and hunger, proved the final insult. On the other side, volunteers ready to preserve the Union were disappointed by deployment to the frontier, yet they soon recognized that military campaigns demanded sacrifice no matter who the enemy or where the location of the battlefield.

In July 1863 Sibley's column encountered several large villages gathered to hunt bison near Big Mound in what is today North Dakota. "The Indians seemed to be friendly," noted one soldier, "& said they did not want to fight but surrender" (102). Sibley arranged a parley, but then decided to attack, causing peace factions to side with resisters. Sibley's soldiers found combat exhilarating and declared each battle a victory. Beck claims that the Indians' goal was simply to delay the army's advance so that their families might escape (although many women and children drowned retreating across the Missouri River), and he is critical of Sibley's exaggerated final report designed to please Pope and a vengeful audience back home.

Marching into Dakota Territory in 1863 and again the following year, Sully was determined to defeat anyone in his path. Sergeant Joseph H. Drips, Sixth Iowa Cavalry, was confident that they could "thrash any force of Indians," and added with confidence, "We in this campaign are all bravados" (145). But Sioux bands gathered in response. The powerful Lakota, including Sitting Bull and his Hunkpapa, changed the odds in the daylong battle at Killdeer Mountain until Sully employed his cannons, particularly against noncombatants in the village. Afterward, the allied tribes harassed Sully's troops in the Badlands, but soon dispersed, ending the overall threat. Pope prepared for another campaign in 1865, although no one thought it necessary, especially volunteers wanting to return home.

Those men shape Beck's study, and they help us understand a distant time, no matter how sentimental or harsh it seems. Beck is equally adept at relating the Indians' story, viewing them as active, capable participants and not victims. He does mistakenly call Ramsey Minnesota's first state governor (it was Sibley), but that is easily misconstrued and does not detract from what is a sound and thoughtful examination of an important piece of history.